

CANYON CINEMA NIGHTS: ECCENTRIC VISIONS

Curated and presented by Michael Wallin

Thursday, May 18, 1995

This program is the third in a series of guest-curated programs selected from Canyon Cinema, the Bay Area's premier distributor of alternative film. Tonight's curator, Michael Wallin, has been a fixture in the Bay Area's avant-garde film community for over twenty years, including stints as a film instructor at California College of Arts and Crafts and manager of Canyon Cinema for most of the 80's. Up until last year, Wallin was a member of Canyon's Board of Directors. From his earliest days as a protégé to the legendary Bruce Baillie to his current efforts as a mature artist, Wallin's films have conveyed his direct and deeply felt involvement with the materials at hand. Tonight's films are some of Michael's favorites and are characterized by a wild diversity of styles and the single-minded peculiarity (if not dark perversity) of their vision.

New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops (1976), by Owen Land (a.k.a. George Landow); 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes

A reworking of an earlier film, *Institutional Quality*, in which the same test was given. In the earlier film the person taking the test was not seen, and the film viewer in effect became the test taker. The newer version concerns itself with the effects of the test on the test taker. An attempt is made to escape from the oppressive environment of the test—a test containing meaningless, contradictory, and impossible-to-follow directions—by entering into the imagination. In this case it is specifically the imagination of the filmmaker, in which the test taker encounters images from previous Land films... As he moves through the images in the filmmaker's mind, the test taker is in a trance-like state, and is carried along by some unseen force... At the end of the film the test taker is back at his desk, still following directions.—(OL)

Cartoon le Mousse (1979), by Chick Strand; 16mm, b/w, sound, 15 minutes

Chick Strand is a prolific and prodigiously gifted film artist who seems to break new ground with each new work. Her ... "found footage" works such as *Cartoon le Mousse*, are extraordinarily beautiful, moving, visionary pieces that push this genre into previously unexplored territory. If poetry is the art of making evocative connections between otherwise dissimilar phenomena, then Chick Strand is a great poet, for these films transcend their material to create a surreal and sublime universe beyond reason.

—Gene Youngblood, Canyon Cinema Catalog 7

The Off-Handed Jape (1967), by Robert Nelson; 16mm, color, sound, 9 minutes

I've always felt good about this film because it's beyond criticism. No one can say it's awful, no matter what elaborate reasons they construct, without talking about what's good in the film. If it's truly awful, then it's just right, because that's exactly what we had in mind. If you can't enjoy that kind of awfulness, that's another matter ... and I'd have to say "that's your problem because, after all, there are plenty of other kinds of awfulness that you really do enjoy, and YOU know it!"—(RN)

The Mongrel (1978), by George Kuchar; 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes

Not really a poem to God spelled backwards, but more a limerick to a pee-pee licker, *The Mongrel* will leave you with the question of whether the subject of the light verse walks in this film on four legs...or two. —(GK)

Film Watchers (1974), by Herb deGrasse; 16mm, color, sound, 5 minutes

DeGrasse's tirade at an audience he'd rather not have. (Remember if you feel insulted those insults are for you.) —(HD)

Breakfast (1972-1976), by Michael Snow; 16mm, color, sound, 15 minutes

Shot in 1972 and shelved until 1976, when sound and editing problems were solved. All the varied and unusual motions visible on the screen are the result of a single camera movement.—(MS)

The Secret of Life (1971), by Victor Faccinto; 16mm, color, sound, 15 minutes

The characters populating Faccinto's films are nightmare figures, often with monstrosly distorted bodies, some wearing ominous masks, others part animal, part human. The real horror results from the swiftness and relentlessness with which a violent fate overtakes these characters, who despite their grotesquery, display the ordinary human emotions, weaknesses and fears.

—Barbara Scharres, Trickfilm-Chicago Catalog 1975

Kindering (1987), by Stan Brakhage; 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes

This film presents the voice of a child play-singing in relation to full orchestral 'takes' of The Times and visually juxtaposed with children-at-play (my grandchildren Iona and Quay Bartek) in Americana backyard. They are seen, as in dream, to be already caught-up-in yet absolutely distinct-from the rituals of adulthood. The visuals were photographed and edited to the music collage of Architect's Office performance A0124 by Trevor and Joel Haertling and Doug Stickler.—(SB)

Ronnie (1972), by Curt McDowell; 16mm, b/w, sound, 7 minutes

A naked hustler tells his story nonstop. A real wonder-hunk. —(CM)

Rabbit's Moon (1972), by Kenneth Anger; 16mm, color, sound, 7 minutes

Rabbit's Moon seems to me your finest film, most perfect and, oh all together finest!, of the sharpest clarity. Beautiful, yet beauty balanced by dreadful necessity, so that it is an emblem of the soul's experience: signature... And I think my turn-of-mind here especially appropriate because I also saw this film as your autobiography, all the figures in it aspects of yourself, its magical progress a kind of "story of your life."

—Stan Brakhage, Canyon Cinema Catalog 7

program notes compiled by Rick Danielson